

PARTNERSHIP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY IN SCHOOLS: *A MENTORING OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESSES*

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), Office of Technical Assistance and Technology (OTA) with the support of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) and the New England Academy of Certified Materials Managers (NEACHMM), is offering an opportunity for businesses to partner with local schools and mentor them in addressing serious chemical management issues and assisting in school chemical clean-outs. Businesses can build strong community ties through using their expertise to increase the health and safety of local schools.

Serious chemical management issues have been identified in most Massachusetts schools. These include, large stockpiles of chemicals, aged and unstable materials commonly present in schools (shock-sensitives), extremely hazardous materials present in schools (hydrofluoric acid, mercuric chloride), highly unsafe chemical storage practices, over purchase of chemicals, chemical exposures due to lack of knowledge, and improper disposal of hazardous wastes.

It has been found that school officials are unaware of these risks, and do not have much familiarity with the safety considerations of chemicals they are purchasing and using (including science teachers). Many serious incidents have resulted. For example, the state Bomb Squad has had to respond to several schools to remove aged and unstable ethyl ether. In one area school, incompatible science chemicals were poured down the sink resulting in an explosion in the sewer causing \$500,000 in damage.

EOEEA/OTA would like to facilitate a partnership between area businesses and the local schools in their area. Businesses can participate by:

- Assisting schools with conducting chemical clean-outs.
- Assisting schools in identifying chemicals that require complex management and may be beyond the school's ability to safely manage.
- Using EHS staff to mentor schools on safe chemical management practices.
- Aiding schools in developing a comprehensive chemical management system including streamlined chemical purchasing.
- Assisting schools in adopting green laboratory teaching methods.

EOEEA/OTA will provide:

- Assistance for business staff on common chemical management problems in schools and best management practices for chemical management in schools including toxics use reduction and pollution prevention opportunities.
- Generic written chemical management system guidance that EHS mentors can use to aid schools. The key element in this is an improved chemical purchasing policy.
- Support from EOEEA/OTA staff to both business EHS officials and school officials throughout the process.

As an additional element to this opportunity, businesses can use their strong relationship with chemical vendors to aid them in modifying their chemical sales to schools. The ultimate goal is that chemicals that cannot be safely managed by school officials (i.e., ethyl ether) will not be sold to schools. For more information about the school mentoring program please contact Susan Lanza at 617-626-1068 or at susan.lanza@state.ma.us.